

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

The Power and Impact of the Story

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

July 16, 2013

This story marks the 40th *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* blog post entry since our first posting in April, 2013.

Approximately one-third of the way through our writing for this 150th AVMA anniversary year, I pause to thank my colleagues, staff and my close friends, for their support and diligence, to my contributing authors and co-authors for adding depth and perspective, and to the supporters at Zoetis for their confidence in this body of work and their commitment to enhancing veterinary education.

Thanks also to Dr. Douglas Aspros, president of the AVMA in this sesquicentennial year. One of the most forward thinking veterinarians of this generation, he has a deep respect for history and the impact it has on the future. I have especially appreciated his support for this endeavor.

Special gratitude goes to my employer, Cornell University, for valuing this effort and to my wife, Doris, for her occasional transformational comments, as well as her unfailing encouragement.

Through stories of real people and events I study history, and through history I endeavor to bring to light paths that illuminate our way to the future. Perhaps understanding the trajectory of past paths will help us make midcourse changes to prevent directional errors in the future. Perhaps it will give us confidence that we are on course to a future that wisely shapes our profession.

During the next four months, these stories will benefit from increased levels of participation from veterinary students. This is not just to honor and encourage the next generation of veterinarians, but also to recognize the ongoing efforts of students to embrace history as they forge the future.

Last Saturday afternoon, I received a delightful e-mail from a woman in Ohio named Janet Ward. She and her sister, June Varner, whose great grandfather was a 1884 graduate of the American Veterinary College in New York City, had documentation that he was also a student at the nearby Columbia Veterinary College. They discovered a blog that one of the Cornell veterinary students had written a year ago on another of my sites (www.veterinarylegacy.blogspot.com)¹ and started to piece together more information about their great grandfather.

Their story of Dr. William Henry Gribble will occupy space on this site in the near future, as the sisters have an array of personal information from a journal that was faithfully kept starting January 1, 1878. On October 2nd, 1882, he “packed [his] trunk” and left Rochester, New York, for New York City where he paid his fees (\$110) and started veterinary school at the Columbia campus at 221 East 34th Street. Daily entries continued as he progressed through veterinary college.²

Without a student researching and writing a story of the five veterinary colleges in New York City between 1857 and 1921, this collection of valuable information might have stayed in the family, never being exposed to the broader veterinary world. Additionally, this family would perhaps never have realized how insightful and inspiring their great grandfather’s story is for current and future veterinarians.

There are other examples of students’ research bringing together historical information from the recent past as well as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and some of these gems will find their way into Veritas postings during the next few months.

Finally, I thank you, the reader, for your encouraging comments, questions, helpful suggestions and occasional corrections. Thank you, also, for sharing your family research and for bringing to light information that we would not otherwise be able to share across the profession.

¹ Rivera, Samantha. New York City’s Five Veterinary Colleges. (<http://veterinarylegacy.blogspot.com/2012/09/new-york-citys-five-veterinary-colleges.html>). 2012 Sept 22.

² E-mails from Janet Ward (relative of veterinarian, William Henry Gible) to Donald F. Smith (Cornell University). 2013 July 13, 14.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.